

Kuwait's Approach to the Gulf Crisis

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In-Depth Reports



On September 14-16, 1990, The Washington Institute held its fifth annual Policy Conference at the Wye Plantation. The following is an edited transcript of one speaker's remarks. [Read a summary](#) of the full conference.

The situation inside Kuwait is indescribable. Iraq has isolated Kuwait from the civilized world; the 1.5 million people of Kuwait are in desperate need of food and medical supplies and the Iraqis are blocking both.

Inhumane behavior by the Iraqis is not new to Kuwait -- we have known the Iraqis to be inhumane since their war with Iran. But against a sister Arab and Muslim country it is unprecedented.

Where do we go from here? We have a series of Security Council resolutions that were passed unanimously condemning the Iraqi invasion and calling upon them to evacuate Kuwait. And we have the noble position of the United States. If it had not been for the United States we would not have seen any possibility for a resolution of this conflict. Indeed, the greatest mistake the Iraqis made was miscalculating the position of the United States.

Old Borders

Kuwait existed in 1752 as a country and a people. In 1899, when there was a war between the Ottoman Empire and the British to control the area, we signed a protective treaty with the British guaranteeing the independence of Kuwait.

The Iraqis claim that Kuwait was part of the Ottoman Empire and that since they inherited the Ottoman Empire, Kuwait is part of Iraq. This is completely unfounded. The 1899 treaty between the British and the Ottoman Empire is quite clear in its identification of Kuwait. In 1913, there was an agreement between the Ottoman Empire and the British whereby the boundaries of Kuwait were drawn up as they exist today. When Iraq became a country in 1932, they made an agreement with Kuwait identifying our borders and our sovereignty.

Kuwait continued on this basis until it declared its independence in 1961. At that time, Iraq laid claims to Kuwait though there was no invasion. Kuwait asked the British and other Arab countries to defend Kuwait. In 1963, Kuwait signed with the Iraqis a border agreement whereby Iraq recognized the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Kuwait. Kuwait was then admitted to the United Nations and all international bodies as an independent sovereign nation. It exchanged diplomatic relations with the Iraqis.

When the Iran-Iraq war started, Kuwait had to choose sides and its choice was very limited. This war was imposed upon the Arabs by the Iraqis and had nothing to do with Kuwait's wishes. We knew a war with Iran would be long and bloody. Kuwait is a small nation and we want to live peacefully with our neighbors.

Kuwait supported Iraq during these trying years of war, from 1980 to 1988. We stood by them because the Iranian

threats to export their revolution were very dangerous. Kuwait supported Iraq morally, politically and financially -- our contributions to Iraq's war efforts totaled \$30 billion. Kuwait gave them these amounts in cash or in kind and did not, as Iraq is now saying, call them loans. Kuwait granted these resources to Iraq as contributions to its war efforts. When the war ended in 1988, Kuwait felt a sigh of relief. However, some in Kuwait thought that Saddam Hussein would create new problems, this time with us or the Saudis.

The Present Crisis

Four weeks before the invasion, Iraq submitted a document to the secretary general of the Arab League accusing Kuwait of creating an oil policy damaging to the security interests of Iraq. Iraq also brought up the matter of the borders between Kuwait and Iraq. They accused Kuwait of stealing Iraqi oil and of calling in those debts.

The moment I saw that memo, I knew there would be trouble. None of the points mentioned in the memo had any basis whatsoever. The border problem had been solved in the 1963 agreement. Iraq accused Kuwait of overproducing but we were overproducing at Iraq's request. Iraq was unable, during and immediately after the war, to produce sufficiently because its installations were damaged by the Iranians. Iraq asked us to produce on its behalf. Kuwait was producing about 800,000 barrels a day for Iraq, selling it and giving Iraq the money. The Saudis were doing the same from the neutral zone.

Iraq also accused Kuwait of holding oil prices down. At that time, the ceiling price for oil, as agreed upon by OPEC, was \$18 a barrel. The market was so flooded with oil that this target could never have been reached. The Iraqis thought the oil price at that time was damaging them. But everybody was selling at that price which was then fluctuating at around \$15 a barrel.

Iraq accused Kuwait of stealing oil from a well which is three miles inside Kuwaiti territory. It is a small well which produces 12,000 barrels a day and we operated it to keep it viable because oil wells dry up if they are not operating.

Iraq also said that Kuwait called for Iraq to pay debts it owed to Kuwait though we never did such a thing. Kuwait never regarded the contributions we made to Iraq as loans and we were amazed when the Iraqis brought this subject up. Kuwait would not dare to ask the Iraqis for these monies.

This matter escalated and we saw that the Iraqis were serious in their demands, even though they were completely unfounded. Iraq was massing troops on our borders. Kuwait knew what was happening and we consulted with our allies in the Arab world and with the United States.

Five Arab leaders got involved in trying to mediate these "differences." Hosni Mubarak, King Fahd, King Hussein, the Yemeni president and Yasser Arafat all went to Baghdad and they came to us afterwards and gave us assurances that Saddam Hussein did not intend to use force in resolving his dispute with Kuwait. Others advised Kuwait not to mass troops on the border so as not to provoke the Iraqis. Kuwait did not; we do not have the capabilities to mass many troops anyway. Kuwait is not a military country.

Further, President Hussein called in the U.S. ambassador in Baghdad and in a lengthy discussion gave her assurances that he did not intend to use force. His assurances were communicated to me in Washington and Kuwait took them to be a serious commitment by the Iraqis to the United States and Arab leaders.

Demanding, Not Talking

King Fahd of Saudi Arabia then intervened and asked Iraq and Kuwait to meet for talks in Jiddah, Saudi Arabia. Kuwait saw nothing valid in Iraq's claims but we told them we would go to the International Court of Justice or any other independent international tribunal to settle this dispute. Iraq turned down every attempt Kuwait made to adjudicate this matter in a civilized way.

We met in Saudi Arabia. The Iraqis came with the same documents, the same claims and the same position. They did

not come to negotiate; they were more intent on demanding than talking. King Fahd told the Iraqi deputy president, "Listen, I invited you here to negotiate, not to threaten and you cannot expect a fait accompli."

The deputy president said, "But I do not have any authority from my president to negotiate. You either accept my demands or else." The situation was so critical that King Fahd proposed that this meeting be called a protocol meeting and reassemble the following week in Baghdad. Kuwait said that it was willing to meet and discuss these matters, providing there was a mediator. We felt that we could not negotiate alone with these people; if we agreed on anything one day, the next day the Iraqis would revoke the agreements.

President Hosni Mubarak said he was ready to mediate these talks in Baghdad but they never took place. The Jiddah meeting concluded on the 1st of August. Six hours later the Iraqi troops were in Kuwait. The Iraqis never intended to negotiate anything. They massed their troops with the intention of invading Kuwait and had already drawn up plans for this operation. There were many aspects to their demands that they knew would not be acceptable to Kuwait or to any international tribunal.

The Situation in Kuwait

Kuwaitis are trying to put together a resistance movement with the limited resources they have. The Kuwaitis have refused to collaborate or cooperate with the Iraqis; Iraq could not find a single Kuwaiti willing to help its "new government." But Kuwait is deserts and houses and you cannot fight a proper resistance movement in such terrain.

My concern today is the plight of innocent civilians inside Kuwait and the fate of the Western hostages that have been taken. Kuwaitis are trying their best to harbor Westerners but Iraqi soldiers are combing every area in Kuwait and they are running out of places to hide.

The Iraqi forces have moved in a special army division to deal with the resistance. The flagrant and barbaric disregard for any form of human decency by these invaders is evident. They are involved in a systematic destruction of the infrastructure and, most importantly, the people of Kuwait. Rapes, incarcerations, looting of life-sustaining equipment and executions are widespread by the Iraqi hooligans.

At the same time, the Iraqis are robbing all the houses of food. The people inside Kuwait do not have more than two or three weeks to live if no food is brought in. We are talking about 1.5 million people: 600,000-700,000 Kuwaitis and the rest non-citizens of Kuwait. When the Security Council voted for certain foodstuffs to be brought in under the supervision of the United Nations the Iraqis refused to allow it. They regard giving food to innocent civilians in Kuwait as an infringement on their sovereignty.

Let us hope that we can somehow find a solution to this problem. Some countries have sided with Iraq but they are irrelevant as far as we are concerned. What concerns us is the civilized world as represented by the United States, Egypt, and our brothers in the Arab world who have stood by our side.



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